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Scottish Muslims through a Decade of Change: Wounded by the Stigma, Healed by Islam, Rescued by Scotland

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Abstract

This paper explores the emergence of self-conscious Muslim identities a decade after 9/11 within a generally inclusive Scottish context. Qualitative fieldwork conducted among Muslims in Edinburgh between 2011 and 2013 suggests that Islam has come to the foreground of Muslims' multiple identities as a force that unites an ethno-culturally diverse community in a historical moment of perceived threat and exclusion. Muslims challenge the global post-9/11 negative climate and find in Islam a powerful tool of individual and collective survival. The global stigmatization of Muslimness has local ramifications in, but is not a specific function of, Scotland. Instead, Scotland generally appears to be a place of relative tolerance in which proudly Scottish Muslims can express their Muslimness with a certain degree of freedom. Scotland promotes a uniquely Scottish experience to be Muslim and acts as a conduit for positive, rediscovered religious experiences.

Keywords: Muslims; Islam; identity; community; Scotland; 9/11.

1. Introduction

Within a post-9/11 global context in which Muslims have come at the forefront of social and political attention, this paper will argue that the fluid and complex nature of Muslim identity is negotiated at the interplay between macro sociopolitical negative labels attached to Islam and local, individual and collective internalizations, reflections and reshaping of such labels. The transitional nature of Muslim identities will appear as an ongoing process of individual and collective identity formation that has been influenced by, and reacted to, post-9/11 uncertainties and threats. In this sense, 9/11 will be understood as a watershed moment for the contestation, formation and development of expressive and reactive Muslim identities, which: are grounded in the religious and ideological sense of unity, commonality and shared destiny offered by Islam; and

emerge as a consequence of, and in opposition to, the negative label that Western societies have placed on Muslims. A tool of individual and group survival, Islam acts as a unifying banner that brings together heterogeneous ethno-cultural constituencies and promotes the awakening of a visible Muslim consciousness. The local Scottish context in which strengthened Muslim identities play out will be shown to be generally tolerant and welcoming towards diversity. Strong sentiments of belonging to Scotland allow young, ethnically diverse Muslims to negotiate their Muslimness within the rather inclusive boundaries of Scottishness. While stigmatization and discrimination, as a result of global suspicion towards Muslims, take place also in Scotland, the country will emerge as a place generally conducive to the positive operationalization of Muslimness, especially among those looking to rediscover a sense of religiosity that can be freely expressed and openly encouraged.

2. From Asians to Muslims: the emergence of the Islamic unifying banner

The presence of Muslim communities in Great Britain has gained great social and political visibility in the past thirty years, especially after the Honeyford Affair[1] in 1984 and the Rushdie Affair[2] in 1989 and, from 2001 onwards, following the various Islamist terrorist attacks in the United States and Europe. This process has been framed within a context in which 'British discourse on racialised minorities has mutated from "colour" in the 1950s and 1960s to "race" in the 1960s-1980s, "ethnicity" in the 1990s and "religion" in the present period' (Peach 2005: 18). In particular, the Rushdie Affair marked the beginning of the history of British and European Muslim communities, as it signalled the emergence of a 'Muslim' (instead of ethnic, e.g. 'Asian' in Great Britain) social identification and categorization that placed religion at the core of broad discourses around the integration of people of Islamic faith within modern Western societies (Marranci 2008).

The importance of the Rushdie Affair in the shaping of a sense of British Muslim collectivity cannot be stressed enough since it 'marked the end of local pan-Asianism and the emergence of a separate Muslim identity that did away with a particular idea of South Asian cultural heritage in favour of a number of brands of "authentic" Islam' (Bolognani 2012: 622). Already back in the mid-1990s, ethnicity had started to become

quite a peripheral element to the identities of a number of British Muslims (Jacobson 1997). Similarly, in the 4th National Survey of Ethnic Minorities in Britain, South Asians self-identified through religion for the most part (Modood et al. 1997). Furthermore, a study conducted by Archer (2001) in the late 1990s shows that young Muslims living in England upheld predominantly religious, and not national or ethnic, identities. According to the author, such a choice allowed Muslims to both reject whiteness and a wider British identity and unite with people from different ethnic origins under the same religious identity banner. It must be remembered, however, that other literature, such as Peach's (2006) study of London Muslims, show high intra-Muslim ethnic segregation, therefore making it difficult to assess exactly how religiously homogeneous the Muslim community is.

Understandably, 9/11 and the related sociopolitical climate further strengthened Muslims' religious affiliation. Peek (2005) draws parallels between the emergence of hybrid Arab-American identities after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the post-9/11 solidification of Muslim American identities. In the author's own words:

> that catastrophe [i.e. 9/11] led to an identity formed in response to crisis – an *identity of crisis* – as Islam came under intense scrutiny by non-Muslim Americans. Following September 11 […] being Muslim American has new meanings, as religious identity has become even more central to their social and personal selves. […] The interviewees' religious identities were shaped and further strengthened by the post-September 11 hostility as well as the perceived threat to both Islam and their individual identities. (Peek 2005: 237, emphasis in the original)

This is not only a feature of American society, as current generations of British Muslims are also coming closer to Islam due to a better comprehension of the religion and as a consequence of racial hostilities (Abbas 2005). Within a sociocultural context of high Islamic intergenerational transmissibility (Scourfield, Taylor, Moore and Gilliat-Ray 2012), nowadays young, predominantly British-born Muslims have sidelined regional identifications in favour of more prominent religious identities (Meer 2010).

Arguably, Muslims are not a monolithic group; they form part of diverse groups that play out their Muslimness differently in society (Field 2011). More generally, Muslims uphold dynamic and multi-layered identities. British Muslims construct and

consolidate so called 'and' identities (e.g. British *and* Pakistani *and* Muslim) which 'are evolving, heterogeneous entities that are shaped by a carousel of identity choices around, *inter alia*, place, faith, nation and politics' (Mythen 2012: 407, emphasis in the original). In this sense, British Muslims' identities are highly situational and contextual. On the one hand, national belonging is sometimes defined in a way that delimits Muslim identity around discourses of practice and citizenship (Moorey and Yaqin 2010). Therefore, Muslims are required to both demonstrate allegiance to Great Britain and their British identities and performatively show active belonging to the imagined – or as Roy (2007) would say, 'virtual' – global Muslim community (*ummah*), whose increased affiliation has been recently triggered by global events, such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Hussain and Bagguley 2012). On the other hand, young British Muslims have had problems reconciling ethnic and religious identities to the point that some decide to give more emphasis to the religious aspect or the ethnic aspect of their identities based on the context in which they find themselves (Jaspal 2011).

In Scotland, little research has been conducted, especially on the long-term post-9/11 developments of Muslim identities and the awakening of a collective Muslim consciousness within the specific sociocultural and political Scottish context. Available research shows that Scottish Muslims identify more with Scotland than Great Britain (Hopkins 2007) and have stronger national sentiments towards Scotland than Muslims living in England have towards England (Kidd and Jamieson 2011). More broadly, Hopkins (2007) argues that nowadays Muslims both affiliate with Islam and connect with Scottish society and culture. Saeed, Blain and Forbes (2001) also confirm this finding with regard to young Scottish Pakistanis, whose religious identities tend to go hand in hand with their national and ethnic identities. These findings generally follow broader British literature according to which, while it is true that religion is a fundamental badge of identity for British Muslims (Nyiri 2007; Robinson 2009), Muslims hold multiple non-contradictory identities, usually based upon both religion and nationality (Dwyer 1999; Nyiri 2007).

Other research conducted in Scotland by Wardak (2000 and 2002) and Qureshi (2004, 2006 and 2007) has a predominantly pre-9/11 focus that highlights ethnic and cultural, especially intergenerational, changes and tensions that are still present today. However, these pieces of research are not able to offer specific insights into the post-

9/11 strengthened 'Islamization' of Muslim identities at the interplay between macro sociopolitical emergent religiously labelled categorizations and stigmatizations and micro-level, daily self-reflected and interacted internalizations of conscious, visible, reactive and expressive allegiances to Islam. Furthermore, they say little about the interface between Scottish identities and Muslim identities especially within a sociocultural and political context, i.e. the Scottish one, which has valued diversity under successive governments and seen Muslims as central to stories of 'One Scotland, Many Cultures'. The Scottish context is also deemed to follow an 'aspirational pluralism' (Meer 2013) and to be less Islamophobic (Hussain and Miller 2006) and less ethnically exclusive (Kyriakides, Virdee and Modood 2009) than England, therefore making it a sociologically interesting *locus* of enquiry. The next Section will show how this paper aims at addressing these gaps through the use of qualitative methods and an exploration of the experiences of Muslims in Edinburgh.

3. Methodology

This paper is based on a section of the data generated through thirty-nine interviews and participant observation conducted with Edinburgh's Muslims between September 2011 and March 2013, as part of a doctoral research project at a Scottish university. Research participants represented a variegated pool of voices within the Muslim community, given their diversity in terms of ethnicity, age group, gender, social class and length of residence. Twenty-seven interviewees were male and twelve were female. Half of the interviewees were within the 20-39 age group, while the other half was within the 40-60+ age group. About two-thirds of the interviewees were of South Asian background or heritage (Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian and Scottish or British Pakistani), while the remaining third was from a range of different ethnic backgrounds (African, Middle Eastern, British mixed, Scottish, etc.). Half of the interviewees had lived in Edinburgh for over twenty years (some for their entire life), while the other half for less than twenty years. According to an educated guess mostly based on educational attainment and occupation, slightly more than half of the interviewees were from a middle or upper-middle social class (in particular, those within the 20-39 age), while the remaining section belonged to the working and lower classes.

Access into the community was made through two institutional gatekeepers at 'Mosque A' and 'Mosque B' (names of mosques are anonymized). 'Mosque A' is an ethnically diverse and international mosque attended by a variegated pool of Muslims. 'Mosque B' is largely attended by older generation Pakistanis who have created a rather tight-knit institutional and sociocultural community. Interviews were aimed at exploring various themes around the conceptualization and operationalization of Muslimness within post-9/11 Scotland such as identity, community, relationship with non-Muslim people, authorities and institutions and the broad impact of 9/11 on Muslims in Edinburgh (not all of these themes are discussed within this specific paper). Most interviews were conducted at the two mosques or at local cafes, while a couple took place at the research participant's workplace and house. Interviews followed standard academic ethical codes of conduct aimed at 'assuring confidentiality, minimizing the impact of recalling and reporting stressful events, and avoiding deception' (Liebling and Stanko 2001: 424).

Participant observation of various public and semi-public occasions, as well as informal community meetings and conversations with Muslims in town, was predominantly conducted at 'Mosque A', Mosque B', a Muslim student society, Muslim charity activities, interfaith and intercommunity events, a few anti-Israel and pro-Palestine marches and a couple of protests in response to Scottish Defence League's demonstrations. During such occasions, in which the researcher was able to deploy his 'peripheral membership' (Adler and Adler 1987), it was possible to draw a conceptual sketch of community structures, ideologies and relationships with non-Muslims.

The researcher's positionality classed him as an outsider within the community and made it difficult to access deeper social, cultural and religious community's structures and taking part into a wider range of activities, especially within a low-trust post-9/11 sociopolitical context (Spalek 2011). However, the researcher's stance as what Bolognani (2007) would define 'a third party', i.e. someone who is neither British/Scottish nor a member of any Muslim minority ethnic community, probably helped allay some suspicion and still allowed enough participation to collect a good amount of reliable data. Furthermore, the maintenance of a peripheral membership allowed the researcher to avoid both emotional attachment to research participants, which would have raised considerable ethical issues, and the possibility of 'tak[ing] for

granted the things which researchers [, unlike fully experienced members,] ought to regard as puzzling' (Gomm 2008: 273). Key figures within the community and all of those with whom the researcher had come into direct contact were aware of the researcher's role and some of them later took part in formal interviews. Data was recorded on an electronic field-note and, along with interview transcripts, analysed with the use of NVivo. The coding of data followed both a deductive and inductive approach with a mixture of *a priori* codes and grounded codes. The interpretation of data was conducted through a dialectic approach combining theory and emergent data in a continuous process that, following the adaptive theory proposed by Layder (1998), locates theorization and data in constant interaction with one another.

4. The 'Muslim' context in Scotland and Edinburgh

Scotland Census 2011 provides some numbers to contextualize the contemporary presence of Muslims in Scotland. The Scottish Muslim community accounts for about 1.4% (77,000) of the total population, an increase from 0.8% (43,000) registered in the Census 2001 (Scottish Executive 2005), and makes it the second-largest religious group in the country behind Christians (53.8% in total when 'Church of Scotland', 'Roman Catholic' and 'other Christian' are brought together) if those of no religion (36.7%) are excluded (National Records of Scotland 2013). The city that hosts the largest number of Muslims in Scotland is Glasgow[3] (42%), followed by Edinburgh (16%): these two cities together account for almost 60% of the total Scottish Muslim population. When adding to the count Aberdeen (6%) and Dundee (5%), the Census shows that almost 70% of Muslims in Scotland are concentrated in four main cities.

The specific 'Muslim' context of Edinburgh is quite unique and rather different from the one in Glasgow and other main British conurbations (e.g. Bradford (Carling 2012)), where ethnic communities are often clustered within particular city areas. Many Glaswegian Muslims live in Pollokshields, which is the most ethnically segregated area in Scotland, is burdened with serious problems of discrimination and racism (Hopkins 2004) and has become a distinctively Pakistani and Muslim place: shops have dual signs (English and Urdu), Asian clothes shops display mannequins dressed in *shalwar kameez* and there are beauty salons for women only (Siraj 2011).

On the contrary, the Muslim community in Edinburgh (about 12,500 people, i.e. 2.6% of the total population, in 2011) is quite widespread and dispersed throughout the city and this seems to favour closer contact and better integration within wider society. Qureshi (2004) points out that Edinburgh's Pakistanis (the largest Muslim group in town with almost 6,000 people) enjoy decent standards of living and financial security. In Wardak's (2000) study of Edinburgh's Pakistanis in the early 1990s, today's older generations were generally self-employed and owned their private businesses. Many older members of the Pakistani migrant community (90 per cent according to Wardak's study) originate from the Faisalabad area in the Punjab, especially the rural areas, and live in Leith (East Edinburgh), Gorgie (West Edinburgh) and Broughton (North Edinburgh). The majority of them are part of the *Barelvi* tradition within the Sunni denomination (the other main Sunni tradition in Pakistan being the *Deobandi*).

Although this indicates that Pakistanis are a major component of the whole Muslim community, Edinburgh's Muslims are a group that presents itself in rather ethnically heterogeneous terms. The main Edinburgh mosque is placed in the city centre and within the University of Edinburgh campus, thus representing a visible urban sign of Muslimness within a very diverse geographical and social location, which is highly populated with students and tourists. In total, Edinburgh hosts eleven known mosques, nine of which cater for the majority Sunni Muslim community and two of which cater for the minority Shi'a Muslim community. These mosques are formally 'open' to all Muslims but in practice cater for different ethnic and cultural communities (e.g. Pakistanis, Scottish-Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Arabs, etc.). Some of them operate in 'partnerships' with one another in terms of activities and core membership based upon similar ethnic and cultural affiliations, as well as theological understandings of Islamic principles.

However, after 9/11[4] many younger Muslims' ethnic and cultural affiliations have been losing grip at the hands of a more transversal symbol of unity: that is, Islam as a religion and an ideology. The development of expressive and more conscious religious identities at the interplay between post-9/11 (often negative) sociopolitical conceptualizations of Muslimness and Muslim internal responses, reactions and self-reflections will be the core of the next Section, which is based upon data emerged during fieldwork in Edinburgh.

5. Developing Muslimness: the contested nature of visible identities

The fact that research was conducted ten years after 9/11 entails that the initial reaction to, and the emotional impact of, 9/11 had been reduced but not vanished. Instead, a more settled post-9/11 process of Muslim identity development as operationalized at the interplay between external macro-political categorization and internal, individual and collective self-reflection emerged as a cross-sectional experience among the Muslim cohort that took part in this research, with a higher intensity among younger Muslims and a certain homogeneity across the ethnic and gender spectra. Fieldwork conducted in Edinburgh demonstrates that this process broadly follows: Cooley's (1922) 'looking-glass self' concept of identity as a reflection of others' perceptions and judgments; and Jenkins' idea of selfhood as 'an ongoing and, in practice, simultaneous synthesis of (internal) self-definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others' (Jenkins 2008: 40). This Section will develop and explain such a process.

As a Somali migrant to Scotland, Ghedi had lived in Edinburgh for over twenty years. During interview, he recognized that being Muslims a minority in Scotland makes their visible Muslimness – that is, exhibiting visible markers popularly attached to Muslims (e.g. beards, *hijabs*, traditional clothing, skin color, etc.)[5] – an easy target for stigmatization. Drawing from Goffman's (1983 and 1990b [1963]) idea of social positioning and categorization as mediated through body markers and visual contact, Muslims' hyper-visibility might inform they ways in which the non-Muslim majority categorizes them at *prima facie* level and reproduces social rules of interaction and engagement. Ghedi's passage below exemplifies this process of external inference of alien identity as based on visible physical and cultural markers:

> People define Muslims by how you dress. If you are a Muslim man and you wear a *shalvar kameez*, it says that you are a Muslim even before you talk. If you wear a turban, again it is the same thing. If you have a beard, that is again the same thing. At the beginning, Muslims were treated as a racial group: people would say to you 'Paki' as it happened to me a number of times. Then, 9/11 changed things. If you have a beard and wear a *khamis*, they will call you 'Bin Laden'. (Ghedi, Somali man in his mid-fifties)

The transformative process of Muslim identities is here played out at the interplay between the global sociopoliticization of post-9/11 Muslim categorizations and a local heightened self-awareness of being part of a very contested religious and ethno-cultural community. Being (at times negatively) categorized as a Muslim, or more broadly as someone different from the majority society, was perceived by both people who had migrated to Scotland and still showed visible signs of ethnic or cultural diversity other than skin color (e.g. accent, mannerisms, traditional clothes, etc.) and women who used to wear the *hijab*, i.e. a highly visible symbol of affiliation to Islam.

Also a few Scottish-born Muslims who possessed many key 'Scottish identity markers', in particular birthplace, upbringing, residence and accent (Kiely, Bechhofer, Stewart and McCrone 2001; McCrone and Bechhofer 2008), shared similar perceptions. Akhtar is a young man of Pakistani heritage who was born and socialized in Edinburgh. His only visible sign of diversity from the white majority is his skin color. Unlike Ghedi, he usually wears neither a beard nor traditional clothes that could make him stand out as an 'alien' in society. Akhtar located his identity within a multi-layered ethnic, religious and national context and argued that identity is deeply influenced by people's perceptions of, and engagements with, him. The young Scottish-Pakistani man perceived that his 'otherness' might inform non-Muslims' specific attitudes towards him. While particular treatments and special attentions are not always of a negative nature, these might signal an out-group categorization in which some non-Muslims place Akhtar by engaging with him in a different way than they would do with an 'ordinary' white Scottish man:

> In practical terms my identity has not caused problems but it does very much affect things in terms of how people perceive me. I have seen situations in which I am studying or when I am doing similar things and people – the majority, the non-ethnic majority – would perceive me as someone of Pakistani background even though I have lived here all my life. But that is the way. At university sometimes lecturers feel that they have got to tell me a little bit more because I am of Pakistani background. Of course, I do not tell them 'go to hell' but I guess that it feels strange. […] When I am with people from my own background then again I am perceived as of Pakistani background. So identity is very much affected

10

by how people perceive you. […] If someone asked me 'what are you more?' I would probably say Muslim, although I do not know why it is like that. (Akhtar, Scottish Pakistani man in his early twenties)

The externally ascribed categorization and internal development of such a categorization in defining one's identity work together in forming the understanding of one's self and its operationalization in daily life. As many other interviewees mentioned, multiple identities (national, cultural/ethnic and religious) are upheld at the same time and integrated within a networked system in which each identity aspect is not fixed and completely separated from the others but works in a dialogical and contextual fashion. Akhtar stressed the contextuality of identity: that is, the deployment of or predominance given to a particular aspect of identity in specific social occasions. Especially in Muslim places (e.g. mosques and at events arranged by Islamic organizations) or highly cultural and ethnic spaces (e.g. South Asian festivals and celebrations), some people project and present identities that are better suited to the expected environmental sociocultural rules.

The shifting between the presentation of one aspect of identity or another is broadly based upon front stage techniques (Goffman 1990a [1959]) that allow the individual to navigate through different sociocultural expectations and ease interactions within different spaces. It also follows Prokopiou, Cline and de Abreu's (2012) argument and other interviewees' idea of identity as fluid, fragmented, situational and contextual. Some aspects of identity might remain dormant in order to give prominence to those other elements that are more relevant to the immediate social situation in which one is placed. However, as the next Section will show, Scottish Muslims have undoubtedly found an overarching unifying religious and ideological identity banner in their belonging to Islam.

6. The Muslim identity shelter: surviving the stigma through Islam

The previous Section started showing that the shaping of Muslim identities is a process that connects with wide externally ascribed categorizations that inform the ways in which individuals of Muslim faith are considered by others and see themselves reflected. Saad encapsulated the developmental process of Muslim identity formation that has been underway since 9/11 as both a consequence of superimposed Beckerian

labels of outsiderness (Becker 1966) – that is the idea that people take up the social labels and/or identities that are attached to them by others – and individual reactions and reflections over such a label:

> A lot of Muslims will live their lives without knowing what a Muslim is. But as soon as people start calling them 'Muslim', 'Muslim', 'Muslim', they will start thinking about what being a Muslim means. Then, if they find that being Muslim is bad they might leave Islam. However, if they think that there is nothing wrong with being Muslim and that people accusing them are wrong, they will become stronger Muslims. This situation has helped Muslims wake up to their internal realities. That is why you now see a lot more people with beards, a lot more people wearing a *hijab* and a lot of people becoming Muslim. After 9/11 many people have asked themselves 'what is Islam?' because they did not know much about it before. People used to know me as Saad, but after 9/11 they started considering me as 'Muslim' Saad and having an interest in what Islam is. That is why many people started reading Islam and becoming Muslim, because they understood that this is the right religion.
> (Saad, Pakistani man in his mid-thirties)

This extract is crucial to comprehend the constructive nature of Muslimness whose conceptual foundations reject both universalist and culturalist approaches to identity (Marranci 2008). In fact, Muslimness appears to be part of a more complex and fluid process of external categorization and internal self-reflection that has emerged within post-9/11 societies as a result of global events that have threatened the socio-psychological identities of Muslims. While in Foucault's (1998 [1978]) *History of Sexuality* homosexuals became a 'specie' and a group as a consequence of the negative label and definition that were imposed on them, similarly the process of Muslimness has been promoted by the global negative categorization and essentialization that emerged from 9/11 within mixophobic[6] 'communities of similarity' (Bauman 2007) colored by social insecurities and fears of the 'other'.

Sartawi and Sammut (2012) argue that perceived threats to Muslimness cause identity pressures on British Muslims. Such pressures are dealt with either by avoiding identification with the Muslim community or by emphasizing it. Informal conversations

with people in position of authority at local mosques seem to downplay the argument that some Muslims might have rejected Islam as a reaction to social labelling, although some Muslims became more cautious about showing visible signs of Muslimness in public. On the contrary, a number of people, including Saad, argued that the external process of Muslim categorization determined a shift in the understanding of Muslimness and the awakening of internal religious identities. This is a finding that consistently runs through a number of interviews and informal conversations with Muslims in Edinburgh and is particularly relevant to younger generations: that is, young Muslims who were born in Scotland, or migrated to Scotland in the last ten or fifteen years, as opposed to the older migrants who arrived and settled in Scotland over thirty years ago and have united mostly on the basis of cultural and ethnic similarity.

Understandably, a few respondents did not necessarily link their religious awakening to 9/11 per se. In this sense, Alena, a Palestinian woman, found in Islam a tool of cultural transition (Bruce 2011), i.e. a way overcome an identity struggle and to adapt to a different social and cultural environment:

> *Stefano:* How was your experience of moving and settling in Edinburgh?
> *Alena*: The language, the culture and all the rest are so different here. I am from Palestine. I came from Gaza, which is such a closed environment, and all of a sudden I found myself in Edinburgh. So it was difficult and I think that it was also an identity struggle. […] I was confused. I was Palestinian and different from others. I was Muslim as well. So I was kind of in-between but gradually I built up strongly my Muslim identity. I just found myself doing that, especially in my early years of university. With time this was becoming stronger and stronger – this Muslim part of me. I was always proud of my Palestinian part and still am. The British side took me ages to come round. […] Being different was a major thing for me because people kept on asking questions. […] I was not wearing the *hijab*, that came a bit after that. I do not know, I felt that I found rest in my Muslim identity. (Alena, Palestinian woman in her late 20s)

While cultural transition is certainly a reason for a heightened sense of religiosity, this does not happen in a vacuum and is deeply embedded within a global context in which

Muslims are scrutinized and Islam is a ready-made shelter. Most respondents did consciously frame their identity change as a response to the post-9/11 external social categorization of Muslims *qua* Muslims. Zakir had lived for just over twenty years in England before moving to Scotland in the late 1980s. He described his identity transformation through the 1980s and, in its latest development, after 9/11:

> *Stefano*: What impact did 9/11 have on the relationship between Muslims and wider society?
>
> *Zakir*: After 9/11 things changed a bit. I had my own post office for eight years. When 9/11 happened, customers that had known me for years would ask me 'are you a Muslim?' They started questioning my faith. I thought that it was a joke but it was not. So identity changed as well. When I was born we were classified as 'Asian' or 'Pakistani' but mostly Asian. In the 1980s they started putting us into different boxes: 'Pakistani', 'Bangladeshi' and 'Indian'. They split the group. When I used to go to school we would just say 'an Asian meal.' I would call myself British Asian. Surely British but also Asian because I would never be fully accepted as part of the indigenous population. Now I have come to emphasize my Muslim identity more than my Asian identity.
>
> *Stefano:* When exactly did this happen?
>
> *Zakir:* I think that it happened after 9/11.
>
> *Stefano:* What was this due to?
>
> *Zakir:* Mostly because of people asking me if I was a Muslim. (Zakir, British Pakistani man in his mid-forties)

This view was taken forward by Munawar, a Yemeni man, who highlighted how Muslim identities had not taken a passively ascribed but an active, expressive role which serves the purpose of surviving the post-9/11 social crisis that Muslims were experiencing. This is what one might call a positive 'reaction formation' (Cohen 1955) to social exclusion and a Lemertian-esque (Lemert 1951 and 1974) secondary 'deviance' that develops as a response to societal condemnation:

> *Stefano*: How has 9/11 affected the ways in which Muslims go on with their lives here?

> *Munawar*: Muslims have a lot of problems to deal with. They have to clarify the difference between themselves and those people [i.e. terrorists] and who did what. That is the point where identity became an essential thing to have, to show, to express and to tell people.
>
> *Stefano*: So Muslim identities have strengthened…
>
> *Munawar*: …as a response to what happened ten years ago. Actually, it was a response to the social response to what happened. (Munawar, Yemeni man in his early thirties)

From these and other interviews it appears that the emergence of a religious and ideological Muslim shelter under which people of different ethnicities and cultures can find refuge and unite has sped up as a response to the global sociopolitical targeting of Islam and the negative portrayal of Muslims after 9/11. This is the internalization of an individually and collectively (re)constructed Muslim label that appropriates and challenges social stigmatization[7] through the development of a strong survival-oriented Islamic allegiance and pride. Such identities have a function that go beyond mere cultural defence (Bruce 2011). Instead, they are formed to actively and consciously unite diverse ethnic constituencies, which might otherwise remain separate, through the common ground offered by Islam as both a religion and an ideology. This idea was well captured by Adila who argued that 9/11 spurred Edinburgh's Muslims to look beyond their own cultural environment and mobilize through their shared social experiences:

> I think that 9/11 made us wake up. It made Muslims wake up. They were all in their family circles, in their clan circles, in their communities and then they realized that Islam had been insulted because the 9/11 terrorists were Muslims or so-called Muslims. They did something that was very wrong, that in Islam is very wrong. So now we have to tell people that what those people did was very wrong and this is what brought a lot of Muslims together. (Adila, Kenyan Pakistani woman in her mid-forties)

Therefore, Muslim identities have been formed through, and reacted to, the post-9/11 experience, rather homogeneously among ethnically diverse younger generations, despite obvious fragmentations in the ways in which these identities are played out on a daily basis. Furthermore, Islam has served as a tool of individual and collective survival

through which Muslims can find a sense of in-groupness and sharedness in the face of threat and uncertainty. Lastly, Muslim identities have been visibly declared and expressed as a symbol of allegiance to a collective struggle for recognition and equality. This flows into a strong, quasi-metaphysical experience of global groupness that Babar, a Scottish Pakistani man in hid mid-twenties, described as the power of Islam to unite ethnically diverse people and the related feeling, shared by many respondents, that 'being a Muslim is more important than being Scottish, British or Pakistani.' This was visible both at meetings of the Muslim student society, during which attendees used the 'Muslim soft cushion' of religious similarity and commonality of mores to reinforce one another's ideas and beliefs about a number of issues of relevance to Muslims globally and locally, and also in public occasions which displayed a united Muslim self-constructed "consciousness *for* itself" (Meer 2010: 141, emphasis in original), e.g. counter-marches in response to demonstrations of the Scottish Defence League and the silencing of Ishmael Khaldi (a Muslim Palestinian advisor to the Israeli government) during a speech at the University of Edinburgh. The next two Sections will show how this emerged Muslim consciousness has interfaced with the specific Scottish context.

7. Being Muslim *and* being Scottish

If the paper has so far showed the post-9/11 strengthening of Muslim identities, this should not imply that other forms of self-identification have disappeared. Most respondents, especially members of the younger generations, have surely given primacy to being Muslim over other choices of self-identification. However, this goes hand in hand with a duality, or a multiplicity, of identities which include a strong affiliation to Scottish identities,[8] again mostly among younger generations, and even more so within the Scottish-born cohort.[9] This finding is not too surprising. In fact, it confirms the findings of research (Hopkins 2007; Kidd and Jamieson 2011) highlighted in Section Two. What previous research has not identified and what will be highlighted here are the meanings attached to being a Scottish Muslim and the embeddedness of such meanings within a perception of Scotland as a place that has valued diversity and is generally conducive to the operationalization of strengthened Muslim identities.

Still not unproblematically connected to ethnicity, particularly as signalled by birthplace[10] (McCrone and Bechhofer 2008), yet flexible enough to hybridize (McCrone

2002), Scottish identities were proudly upheld by many Muslim respondents and, in their basic form, often related to the enjoyment of certain freedoms and rights that Scotland can offer, e.g. expression of belief, lack of restrictions in practicing Islam, prayer facilities, etc. More broadly, it referred to a sense of national unity that overcomes cultural and religious differences in the sociopolitical enactment of the 'One Scotland, Many Cultures' manifesto. When this issue was deconstructed and respondents were pushed to describe their deeper feelings towards Scotland, this emerged as a multifaceted 'land of relative tolerance'. Admittedly, respondents located perceptions of post-9/11 stigmatization within Scotland, as show in Sections Five and Six. Furthermore, interviewees reported disturbing experiences of discrimination (see also Hopkins and Smith 2008). However, these experiences often appeared to be a result of the global post-9/11 targeting of Muslimness, which also has negative local ramifications within Scottish society, rather than a unique feature of Scotland per se. When purged from perceptions of a global stigmatization and local experiences of post-9/11 pressure (Clegg and Rosie 2005) and discrimination, which still take place in a context where overall race incidents are decreasing (Scottish Government 2013)[11] and phobias have been mostly externalized towards England rather than internalized towards Scottish 'others' (Hussain and Miller 2006), the collective body of perceptions on Scotland generally sustained the belief of a Scottish egalitarian society. That is, a place grounded on a rather inclusive Scottishness (McCrone and Bechhofer 2010) in which an awakened Muslim consciousness has the potential to flourish.

In one way, respondents believed Scotland to be easier to integrate, more welcoming and tolerant and less racist and Islamophobic than England, in line with other studies (Hussain and Miller 2006; Homes, McLean and Murray 2010). Arguably, some Scottish Muslims are attaching themselves to an idea of Scottish nationalism, which has emerged in the post-war period, has been colored by an anti-racist politics[12] and has been based on an 'oppressed Scottish identity' which challenges the 'oppressive imperalist' English nationalism (Kyriakides, Virdee and Modood 2009) and turns a blind eye to Scotland's active colonial involvement in the British Raj (Devine 2006). In more general terms, respondents found Scotland to be a positive, accommodating and welcoming environment to live in, settle down and be Muslim. Specific sociocultural features of Scotland, and especially Edinburgh, were teased out to explain how the

country is meeting Muslims' expectations and, in turn, making it a Scottish experience to be a Muslim despite the negative impact of 9/11 on Western Muslims. A number of interviewees, both Scottish-born and born abroad, highlighted the international and culturally active nature of Edinburgh, the small Muslim community and the absence of urban segregation within the city. The latter is an important socio-spatial element that could ease relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims, according to contact theory (Allport 1954) – 'the greater the familiarity, the lower the level of prejudice' (Field 2007: 465), – and allow an ethnically diverse community bound by a renewed Islamic impetus to integrate and potentially thrive within Scottish rather inclusive sociocultural boundaries:

> I have not spent time in England but I am really glad that I am Scottish. I really am! I do think that here we are better off than anywhere else in the UK. Basically, I think that Edinburgh has the right balance between the amount of Muslims and the amount of non-Muslims. Whereas, in other places where there are far too many Pakistanis you have troubles. For example in Bradford and places like that, they have got issues. (Rabab, Scottish Pakistani woman in her late 20s)

> I really love Edinburgh. That is why I decided to stay on. One thing about Edinburgh is that it is multicultural, so you do not really feel all that different from other people. Even though the Muslim community is small, there are people from all over the world. (Zoe, Singaporean woman in her mid-30s)

> Edinburgh is a university town, there are so many changes of students and of course the festival. And I know it might seem just a bunch of students having fun for a month but this is key for Edinburgh people to deal with foreigners. Edinburgh is such an international city. The Muslim community is very scattered in Edinburgh. There are *halal* shops here and mosques there. There is no predominantly Muslim area here. (Rebecca, Scottish female in her early 40s)

Nasha, a Pakistani woman and a devout Muslim, recounted how going back to Pakistan for a monthly holiday proved to be a very challenging experience. Unable to attend the

mosque due to a lack of facilities in her hometown or to pray in public or semi-public spaces, as she could do in Edinburgh, Nasha became more aware of the Scottish nature of her Muslimness:

> Interestingly, I went back to Pakistan after eight years this summer and I felt very strange there. I felt it was really hard to accommodate to different things. That is when I realized that Edinburgh is my home. I was very young when I came here [early teens] so I would say that I grew up here and my ideas have matured here. You know when you have a sense of the environment and the people and you start realising things in the world. I started understanding the world – that is what happened in Edinburgh. (Nasha, Pakistani woman in her mid-20s)

The vibrant nature of Edinburgh, 'a metropolitan meeting place for different ethnic traditions' (Qureshi and Moores 1999: 327) and the winner of several 'UK best city' awards (BBC News 2009; The Guardian 2012), the Islamic Festival during the annual Fringe Festival, events arranged by the University and other organizations, the effort of interfaith groups and other such activities all help sensitize non-Muslims to ethnic, cultural and religious diversity and foster good relationships with Muslims. At the same time, a number of non-Muslims actively side Scottish Muslims in their efforts to promote global justice, to challenge discrimination and to clear misconceptions around Muslims. This includes non-Muslims' support for Palestine and fundraising events for Muslim countries involved in civil wars (e.g. Syria), demonstrations in response to Scottish Defence League's protests, an interfaith commemoration of 9/11, University-led outreach events, etc. Not only is the 'making' of Scottish Muslims operationalized through a proud sense of Scottishness and positive social engagement with non-Muslims *within* a Scottish a context of relative tolerance; for some Muslim women, it also is actively operationalized *through* such a context, as the next Section will show.

8. Scotland as a conduit for positive Muslim religious experiences

Arguably, Scotland still presents fragmentations and contradictions in the ways in which different religions and beliefs intersect and relate to each other in the public sphere (Allison and Siddiqui 2014). However, particularly for female interviewees,

Scotland and Edinburgh actively supported the process of identity religious strengthening that was described in previous Sections. This is especially true of Muslim women who migrated from a Muslim-majority country to Scotland. Certainly, for some of these women a heightened religious identity represents a mechanism of cultural transition. Yet, respondents narrated journeys of self-discovery in which their affiliation to Islam became more self-conscious and actively internalized not just in adaptation to but also *through* the Scottish context. Nyanath, a Sudanese woman who had lived in Sudan and the United Arab Emirates before relocating to Edinburgh, 'found' Islam in Scotland:

> At the beginning, I was not confident about being a Muslim here. Because when you come from a Muslim country you do not appreciate what you believe in and you do not understand why you believe in it. […] But then I came here and this gave me a chance to think over my beliefs. When I saw that there are many nice people who are really good-hearted people, I started thinking 'what is the difference between me and them? Why do I need to be a Muslim? Why do I need to believe in Islam? Why do I need to believe in a God if I cannot see him?'. So I started to think and reflect and this made me more religious. […] This is more about understanding Islam, understanding the almighty God, understanding people. […] This happened once I moved to Edinburgh and I am now able to be a Muslim around people who are not Muslim. (Nyanath, Sudanese woman in her mid-30s)

Similarly, Chanda, a Bangladeshi woman, found herself to be part of a self-conscious minority and within a supportive Scottish environment in which her rediscovered Muslimness not only had space for expression but its expression was actively promoted:

> When you are in an environment and you think that your existence is talked about, you feel that your existence has an added value for society. In Bangladesh we are not overly practising Islam. There are 86% of Muslims but people take Islam for granted. We do not have strong obligations to practise in Bangladesh. Also, in terms of Islamic symbols, such as scarves, these are not very much in practice in my home country.

There are a lot of mosques in Bangladesh but it is not like in Middle Eastern countries where shops would close as soon as they hear the call for prayer. It is up to you whether you want to pray or not. Here in Edinburgh I really enjoy my spiritual life. I totally enjoy it. This is without question. It does not mean that I have become more Islamic or more spiritual. It is that, whatever I am doing, I feel that the surrounding is supporting me. I think that this is due to human nature. When your identity is talked about, then you want to come out and show that you have very good things to offer. (Chanda, Bangladeshi woman in her mid-40s)

There is a noticeable change in tone compared to those respondents who found their visible diversity to be stigmatized *a priori* as a result of a post-9/11 negative categorization of who a Muslim is. Instead, a number of (mostly female) interviewees suggested that Edinburgh could have the potential to nurture one's religious experiences. Externally pushed to deeply think about their own identity and internally stimulated to discover their religion and spiritual self at a much deeper level, these respondents looked for certainty and stability in Scotland within a global sociopolitical context that has targeted Islam and Muslims. Equally important, the freedoms that a majority of (male and female) respondents mentioned in Section Seven are particularly conducive to a full sense of participated Muslimness, through cultural and religious negotiations, within a Scottish environment in which, for example, women attend mosques more often than they would do in some Muslim-majority countries:

I was at Edinburgh University and I was in George Square and the mosque was nearby, so it just made sense that I went there. Of course my family goes there. But as a woman it was different. Back home women did not really go to the mosque as much. This is not a religious issue, but a cultural issue that men go to the mosque and women just pray at home. So I started to pray at home here too, but then I saw a lot of people going to the mosque – both men and women – so I said 'why should I not go too?' (Alena, Palestinian woman in her late 20s)

21

Arguably, being a female Muslim in Scotland presents nuances and complexities that cannot be overlooked. The onus that is placed on women to publicly perform a 'respectable femininity' (Siraj 2012) at the intersection between religious visibility and cultural conformity highlights the importance of female self-representation and the maintenance of honor by adhering to expected morality and behaviour both within and outside the domestic arena (Qureshi and Moores 1999). Conformity to a strong visible Muslim identity is often promoted through the *hijab* as a way of "increasing one's [at least, performed] accountability as a Muslim" (Hopkins and Greenwood 2013) and, as a tool of physical concealment from men (*purdah*), to further one's status (Siraj 2011), to actively resist Western sexualization and to adhere to cultural codes of conduct based on honor and shame[13] (Werbner 2012). The experience of an active member of the Muslim student society being strongly criticized for wearing Western clothes without a *hijab*,[14] within a social context in which most women had recently started wearing a *hijab* and more traditional clothes, demonstrates that while superficially united through Islam, the Muslim community still presents fragmentations and contradictions that are yet to be resolved. Scotland offers a sociocultural environment generally positive towards, and supportive of, its Muslim population; however, it is yet to offer the ultimate cure to heal intra-community tensions and a space completely free of the post-9/11 stigmatization of Muslimness.

9. Conclusion

This paper explored the transitional process of conceptualization and deployment of Muslim identities that has taken place in Scotland since the beginning of the 21st century. The paper has shown that contemporary Muslim identities have developed at the interplay between the sociopolitical negative construction of, and engagement with, visible Muslimness and an increase in individual and community self-awareness of being part of a globally contested, ethically heterogeneous, but religiously and ideologically rather homogeneous, community. In this sense, Muslims have responded and reacted to 9/11 by developing stronger internal cohesion on the basis of Islam as a religion and an ideology. Malleable, situational and fluid, the identities of Muslims use Islam as the key, unifying aspect that brings together various ethnic and cultural constituencies under the same religious and ideological banner. Not simply a tool of

doctrinal, spiritual and moral sense of sharedness, Islam is also a political and ideological tool that Muslims employ and deploy to respond to the various post-9/11 threats to the Muslim community. The strengthening of Muslim identities, the increase in visible and expressive religiosity and the sociopolitical mobilization of younger generations connect local Muslims to the global Muslim community (*ummah*) in the search for unity in a moment of uncertainty. In Scotland, this self-conscious Muslim community has found fertile ground in a context of relative tolerance and acceptance of diversity. Younger Muslims' strong affiliation to Scotland, at times played out in opposition to England, has helped perpetuate the idea of an inclusive Scottishness which is generally accommodative of stronger, visible Muslim identities. While stigmatization and discrimination take place, they appear to be a ramification of a global post-9/11 targeting of Muslimness, rather than a specific function of Scotland per se. Conversely, Scotland has aided and positively encouraged rediscovered religious experiences especially among women, within a wider Scottish Muslim community which is diverse and fragmented yet, at least superficially, united through Islam.

Notes

1. Ray Honeyford, then headmaster of Drummond Middle School (a predominantly non-white majority school) in Bradford, published an article in the *Salisbury Review* in 1984 harshly criticising the effects of multicultural policies and practices on British education. Following accusations of racism, Honeyford was suspended from his post. He was reinstated after appealing to the High Court but, facing continuous hostilities, he decided to retire in 1986.
2. In 1988 Salman Rushdie published the novel *The Satanic Verses*, which many Muslims considered to be blasphemous. By 1989 the book was banned in a number of countries, such as India, Bangladesh, Kenya, Indonesia, Sudan, etc. American and British bookstores were threatened and bombed. The most notorious reactions to the publication of the book are: the fatwa issued by Ayatollah Khomeini to kill Salman Rushdie; and the public burning of copies of the book by Bradford's Muslims.
3. Glasgow also hosted the initial settlement of Asians in Scotland (Maan 1992 and 2008).
4. Only a few respondents made mention of the attempted bombings on Glasgow airport in 2007. Instead, most of them referred to the post-9/11 context when discussing changes and transformations in their sense of Muslimness. Obviously, this could be a result of the research focus being mostly on the broad post-9/11 context and on the interviews ensuing from such a focus. The few interviewees who spontaneously talked about the attempted terrorist attack in Glasgow argued that the event had not played a major effect on community relations due to the terrorists not being Scottish born (i.e. not being part of the Scottish Muslim community) and, therefore, due to the Scottish non-Muslim community not overreacting to the event.
5. It should be acknowledged that: some of these markers might be wrongly attached to non-Muslims (e.g. Sikhs); and some self-identified Muslims do not display evident 'markers of Muslimness', e.g. those who have white or light brown skin or carry no distinguishable markers of their faith.

6. Bauman defines mixophobia as the fear of mixing with different religious, social or economic groups.

7. This includes negative media portrayals of Islam which a number of interviewees argued to be a reason behind the reproduction of (often negative) social attitudes towards Muslims. In the words of Zemar, an Afghani man in his mid-thirties, through the media 'the story [9/11] gets refreshed and then people think that Muslims are bad.'

8. Scottish self-identification has increased within the general population since the 1970s (Bond and Rosie 2002; McCrone 2001).

9. A number of (both younger and older) migrants also expressed affiliation to Scotland to various degrees of intensity. However, some of the younger Pakistani migrants distanced themselves from Pakistanis born in Great Britain (including Scottish Pakistanis) by referring to them with the slightly pejorative term of 'British-Born Confused Desi'. A further respondent, Zemar (an Afghani man) encapsulated this view by arguing that Scottish-born Muslims from an ethnic minority are trying to 'live on two boats', that is failing to realize that they can be neither fully Scottish nor fully Pakistani (or another Muslim ethnic minority) due to the allegedly intrinsic incompatibility of such two identities and ways of life.

10. Scottish-born Muslims possess this key marker of Scottish identity. However, visible signs of diversity, for example skin color (see Akhtar's case in Section Five), a foreign accent and non-mainstream mannerisms (Kyriakides, Virdee and Modood 2009) could still be an impediment to social recognition of one's Scottish identity.

11. Race incidents decreased 14% in 2012-13 (4628) compared to 2011-12 (5389) (Scottish Government 2012). This is in line with a downward trend seen since 2006-07. However, Pakistanis (23%) and Bangladeshis (1%), i.e. two main Muslim-majority groups, still constituted 24% of victims of racism, thus showing that Muslims continue to be victimized. Religiously aggravated offences for conduct derogatory towards Islam oscillated between 2010 and 2014 but the number of charges (between 15 and 80 each year) is too low to make data of any statistical significance (Scottish Government 2014).

12. It is also argued that sectarian divisions and the nature of Scottish sub-national identities have prevented racist and fascist groups from gaining a foothold in Scotland (Sutherland 2012).

13. Research also found that the *hijab* both promotes more positive body image and decreases the internalization of media-driven beauty standards (Swami, Miah, Noorani and Taylor 2013).

14. This is a case of cultural *and* religious dissonance which takes forward Dwyer's idea of dress as a symbol of oppositional identities (Dwyer 1999).

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